

fully and effectively, so long as those measures are appropriate, and will continue to report periodically to the Congress on significant developments as required by law.

Sincerely,

William J. Clinton

NOTE: Identical letters were sent to Newt Gingrich, Speaker of the House of Representatives, and Albert Gore, Jr., President of the Senate. This letter was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on January 14.

Remarks to Democratic Congressional Leaders and an Exchange With Reporters

January 14, 1998

Health Care Bill of Rights

The President. Thank you very much. Thank you, Mr. Vice President. Thank you, Mr. Gephardt, Senator Daschle. Mr. Bowles, thanks for hanging around. That will minimize our health care bills around here, I can assure you. [*Laughter*] I thank the Members of Congress for being here, and Deputy Secretary Higgins and Secretary Shalala. I'd like to especially thank two Members who are here, Congressman Dingell and Congressman Stark, for their leadership on this vitally important issue.

If I could, just very briefly, I'd like to put this issue into the larger context of what we're doing as a nation at this moment in history. If you look at the history of America, I think it's fair to say that we have not only survived, but prospered and grown increasingly stronger over 200 years because we have found a way, at every moment of challenge and change, to make the adjustments necessary to preserve our enduring values in a new set of circumstances. And we have done it by strengthening our Union and by applying the elemental principles of the Constitution and the fundamental values of the country to a new time. That's essentially what we're being called upon to do today.

I have said for 6 years now that, to me, all of our policies should be able to be explained in terms of three words: opportunity for all, responsibility from all, and a community that includes all Americans. Now, we

know that because of the changes we're undergoing in the way people work and live and relate to each other and the rest of the world, the way all our major systems work because of globalization and the revolution in information and technology, that we are having to systematically reform virtually every major institution of society.

We've dramatically reformed the way the Government works. It's as small as it was—now—when President Kennedy was here. I would argue it's doing more with greater impact in a positive way. We're in the process of trying to create a system of lifetime learning in America, opening doors of college to all Americans and raising the standards of our schools and trying some different things that have not been previously done before.

We're trying to help people balance work and family. That's what the Family and Medical Leave Act was all about, and raising the minimum wage and the earned-income tax credit, and all those things. We're trying to make sure we can preserve the economy—preserve the environment while we grow the economy. And I would argue that we've demonstrated with a different approach you can do both things quite well. But all of this requires, anyway, a sense of purpose, to make sure that nobody gets left behind and that we really do change our institutions that protect the public interest as circumstances change.

That's basically what all these stories are about. I mean, the story that Mr. Gephardt told from the movie "As Good as It Gets," that I remember very well, too, is basically a story of a hard-working woman who's doing everything she's been asked to do by this country, gets up every day, goes to work, doesn't make a lot of money, obeys the law, does her best to take care of her kid, has done what she thought was right to provide health insurance to her child, and the system is not working for her. That means that we have not succeeded in reform. Yes, we've made a lot of progress in health care reform, but we've got a long way to go.

I think we were right to propose to extend Medicare coverage to people who can buy into it who are over 62 and have lost their health insurance or people who are over 55 who have been downsized or promised

health care that they didn't get from their companies. I think that's important.

But this is really important. Why? Because so many people are in managed care and there are so many stories like the one that Senator Daschle told. And again, I would say to you, to me this can—what we should do can be answered in terms of those three little words I've tried to drill into the American consciousness for 3 years. You say to managed care people, okay, we have to reorganize the health care market, and you want the opportunity to sell your policies. Okay, you have that opportunity. You now have the responsibility to make sure when you sell a policy to somebody, they get quality health care. And we have to have an American community that's as healthy as possible. So it hurts us all if people are shelling out money for health insurance policies and they and their children can't get the right kind of health care. We are all diminished by the story that Tom Daschle just told. That's not the America we want to live in. That's not the America we want to represent. That's not the America we want to lift up to the rest of the world. Now, that's what this is all about.

So I know there will be objections to this, but there are objections to every time you want to make a fundamental change. You know, there were objections to our efforts to get the budget under control. The deficit was supposed to be \$357 billion this year when I took office. It's going to be less than \$23 billion, and next year we'll offer a balanced budget—I mean, I'll offer one this year for next year, and we'll have it. There are always objections to anything you do. But the point is, we couldn't go on doing what we were doing because it was unacceptable. It violated our notions of responsibility, we were depriving too many people of opportunity, and we were clearly undermining the future strength of our American community.

That's the circumstance here. We simply cannot go on giving—we all know people who run managed care plans are under pressure—we know that we finally succeeded, thanks in some measure to managed care, in taming the inflation beast in health care for the last few years and that people that run these plans are under great pressures

now. We understand that there may not be easy answers to all these things. But the bottom line is, you cannot justify putting people who pay their insurance premiums and are working hard and are trying to take care of themselves and their children at the kind of risk that so many Americans are at risk of today because they don't have the consumer protections that ought to be elemental in a society like this. And we have to pass this bill because of the dramatic reorganization of health care relationships in America. And we're either going to do it and strengthen our sense of community and strengthen our future, or we're not.

Now, do we all need to listen to what the practical problems are, should we have a good debate? Of course, we should. But the fundamental truth is everybody knows that this is a public interest issue, that the people who are in these plans cannot protect their own interest unless they band together as citizens and unless their elected representatives create a framework in which they can get the health care they deserve and that they're paying for. That's the fundamental truth. You can argue about the details until the cows come home, but we have to make this change because of the changes in the American health care market.

And I have been very heartened by the fact that many members of the Republican Party have expressed support for similar actions, and I'm hoping that we can get a big bipartisan vote for this bill. But if you look throughout the 20th century, the mission of our party, from the beginning of this century, has been to push the changes that need to be made to preserve the basic values of this country in new circumstances. That has been our mission. And we are here today, together, to fulfill that mission.

I believe we'll succeed. I hope we'll have as much Republican support as possible. But every person here and every person that will hear about this, in their heart of hearts—I don't care what they do for a living or what their position might be, their immediate financial interest—everybody knows there have been dramatic changes in the health care delivery system in America that require a change in the framework of protection for

ordinary citizens. And we are determined to give it to them.

Thank you very much.

Q. Mr. President——

Q. Mr. President——

The President. Have we got a shouting contest here?

Situation in Iraq

Q. It's a shouting contest. Do you believe Iraq when it said that it is not experimenting with biological weapons on human beings?

The President. Well, I don't know what the facts are, but I think Mr. Butler's concerns are clearly what justifies the inspection regime. In other words, no American has to decide whether he or she believes Iraq or not, and no American can possibly know whether Mr. Butler is right or not, because all he said is he wants to take a look-see.

There is a framework for inspections. I am very encouraged, by the way, that we got a good statement out of the United Nations Security Council today. It is clear that the international community knows that Saddam Hussein is doing the wrong thing. And we have got to remain steadfast in our determination to continue the inspections process in a nonpolitical way where the leader of Iraq does not get to determine who, when, and what is going on in that inspections process.

I don't know the answer to your question, but I do know that we ought to be able to find out. That's what the U.N. resolution says.

Q. Tariq Aziz says it's a lie.

Q. Mr. President, you're clearly in the better position, though, than most to assess the credibility of those allegations. How seriously should people view the possibility that Iraq could experiment on human beings?

The President. Well, if Mr. Butler says that he believes that he's got enough to go on, we should view it seriously enough to insist that the inspections go forward.

We don't want to do them like they've done us, like they did the head of the inspection team, the American head of the inspection team, where they accused him of being a spy. And we didn't—the United States Government doesn't even know who is on what team from a day-to-day basis. They're all picked by the United Nations. So we don't

want to convict them in advance. But if there is enough evidence for Mr. Butler to say that, then he ought to be able to go look.

I would remind you that in 1995, they admitted having stocks of chemical and biological weapons potential that were very troubling. That they admitted. So that's another reason we've got to keep going and continue these inspections. This is a case where the United Nations actually had it right. They've got a good framework, and we just need everybody to stiffen their resolve now so we can go back and do our jobs. And we have to be absolutely resolute in insisting that it be done.

Thank you very much.

Q. Senator Lott says that you won't get tobacco legislation because it's your fault. [Laughter]

The President. I've missed you. [Laughter]

NOTE: The President spoke at 3:15 p.m. in the Grand Foyer at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Richard Butler, executive chairman, United Nations Special Commission, and President Saddam Hussein of Iraq.

Statement on the AFL-CIO Initiative Against Discrimination

January 14, 1998

Thousands of union men and women have been working hard to improve race relations in the workplace. Members of the AFL-CIO, in the tradition of A. Philip Randolph, have continued to lead the fight against discrimination in the workplace and in society. Today the Race Initiative Advisory Board, meeting in Phoenix, will hear worker and union member testimony highlighting these efforts.

I am very pleased that today the AFL-CIO has announced two initiatives to redouble its members' efforts against discrimination. I applaud their decision to take on this challenge by supporting these initiatives to help further the dialog and learning from today's Race Initiative Advisory Board meeting in Phoenix.

The AFL-CIO's leadership in sponsoring workplace forums on race will provide additional venues for thoughtful dialog and education for workers, managers, and employers.